

134 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part I, Social Life*

843 thing unusual it will affect her child and, further, that a woman in that condition should not look upon a corpse.

[845] Coming Daylight could not remember any cases of stillborn children, but finally Singer recalled that a woman, whom they both had known, had borne triplets which were dead at birth. Incidentally, this was the only case of triplets of which either had ever heard.

Certain prenatal care was taken to ensure easy delivery and healthy offspring. It was often mentioned that in the old days pregnant women were well taken care of. Coming Daylight explained it thus: "In those days a man usually had several wives so that the one who happened to be pregnant was looked after by the others and didn't have to work hard. She was not supposed to do any cooking, and, if it were absolutely necessary that she cook, she must wear something like a heavy apron to protect her lest the afterbirth stick. During hot weather she was supposed to wear a robe on her back, because they claimed that the heat was hard on the breasts. She was not allowed to pack heavy loads. They believed that she should work, but not enough to wear herself out. She was taught to take certain precautions. My grandmother, especially, would tell me, when I was pregnant, such things as: 'If you have to change sides while lying in bed, sit up first and then lie down on the other side. Don't just roll over, or the cord will wrap around the infant's head. If you leave your lodge, you mustn't stand in the door, you must go right through, so the baby will come quickly. Never back into a lodge because that will make the infant come the wrong way.'"

Coming Daylight claimed that she always got along well in childbirth because her infants were small and she followed the advice given her. Her firstborn was the most difficult, as is usual for most women, but her husband was a very fine, mature man who hadn't let her do anything to injure herself during pregnancy. Furthermore he followed the customary Gros Ventre abstention, being "very careful especially during the last month, when Gros Ventre men refrain absolutely from intercourse with their pregnant wives lest, when the infant is born, it be covered with a lot of 'white lard-like stuff.'"

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[211] The length of gestation was counted by moons. If, for in-

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stance, it was the dark of the moon when a woman ceased menstruation, she kept track of the months by marking with charcoal on a piece of wood, or by notching a stick, each successive time the moon was in that phase and "she would usually estimate it right."

Childbirth usually took place right in the woman's own lodge. Should someone there be sick, he would be moved to another lodge if possible, for while it was considered bad for the sick person to be in the same lodge with a woman in her menses, it was much worse were the woman in labor, for the odor of the blood at delivery would affect the sick person adversely. In fact, a person who had only been near the place where a woman was being delivered was not allowed to come near a person who was ill. If the patient could not be moved, the woman in labor would go to another lodge, preferably to that of her grandmother or of her widowed aunt. She would avoid her own mother's lodge as her father or brothers might be around and she would be "ashamed" to go where they might be.

Although the attitude has somewhat changed now, in former times, according to Coming Daylight and Singer, a pregnant woman was supposed to be reticent regarding her condition right up to the last moment. She might suffer intensely, but "you would never know there was a thing wrong with her." Only when she seemed to be very close to term did they send for a midwife and for some old man or woman who would give her medicine. A male doctor did not touch a woman in labor, but would give her medicine to alleviate the pains. Mary told of her own experience. "There was a well-known doctor of this kind who died about ten years ago. He was blind and, when called on a case, would sit with a pot of medicine beside him. He attended me and when he heard me say I was in pain he would just touch me with the end of the stick and the cramps would go away. Finally I complained that I was tired. The midwife said that it would soon be over, but the old doctor told them: 'No. It hasn't turned yet.' I thought this was strange that he should know this as not only was he blind but he had not touched me. Later on he said: 'It will be about a half hour more.' And he was right."

Different practitioners have different methods. Singer witnessed the following case. "A man had received power from

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776 Ventres or the enemy. According to another, the sun on one
 821 occasion delivered seven Gros Ventre men, to be killed by the
 [539] Crow, into the hands of a Gros Ventre woman captured by the
 Crow, so the woman claimed. Apart from the incidental inclusion of the moon, bracketed with the sun, in prayers and in invitations to sweat as above stated, there was no specific independent moon cult and in no case, according to our informants, were sacrifices ever made to the moon. Nor, so far as we could discover, was there any star cult, though the stars, or some of them such as those constituting the Great Dipper, the Pleiades, the Bear were seemingly looked upon as in some sense "spirits" or personal beings. In the archaic era, before the flood and Ni:hahat, people used to go in the morning to get fire from the morning star, "the cross," just as in modern times the old people
 [372] used to go in the morning to get a live coal from a neighbor's hearth instead of using matches. The morning star served also as a "clock." When people were planning to get up unusually early in the morning they would be guided by its position in the
 • [805] heavens. Someone in the lodge would be told: "Go out and see if the cross is up yet."

776 Among the beings involved in prayers and invited to sweat, after the Supreme Being, were the "Four Old Men," currently referred to by English-speaking Gros Ventres as the "Four Holy Old Men." According to Singer and Coming Daylight there were also, it appears, "Four Old Women," but this statement was not independently confirmed by other informants.

Very little is known about these Four Old Men. The Boy had more than once asked his father about them, but Lane Bull could only say that the Gros Ventres were taught by Ni:hahat to call on them in praying and sweating but that the people did not know who they are. They lived in the very beginning of things, but whether before or after the flood, is not quite clear. They were not human beings. Gros Ventre belief does not associate them
 776 with the four winds or cardinal directions, but, vaguely, with the
 801 sacred number four, the four "ridges" or stages of full human life, and the four great floods or other great catastrophes or revolutions, of which the first was the primeval flood, that are to occur,